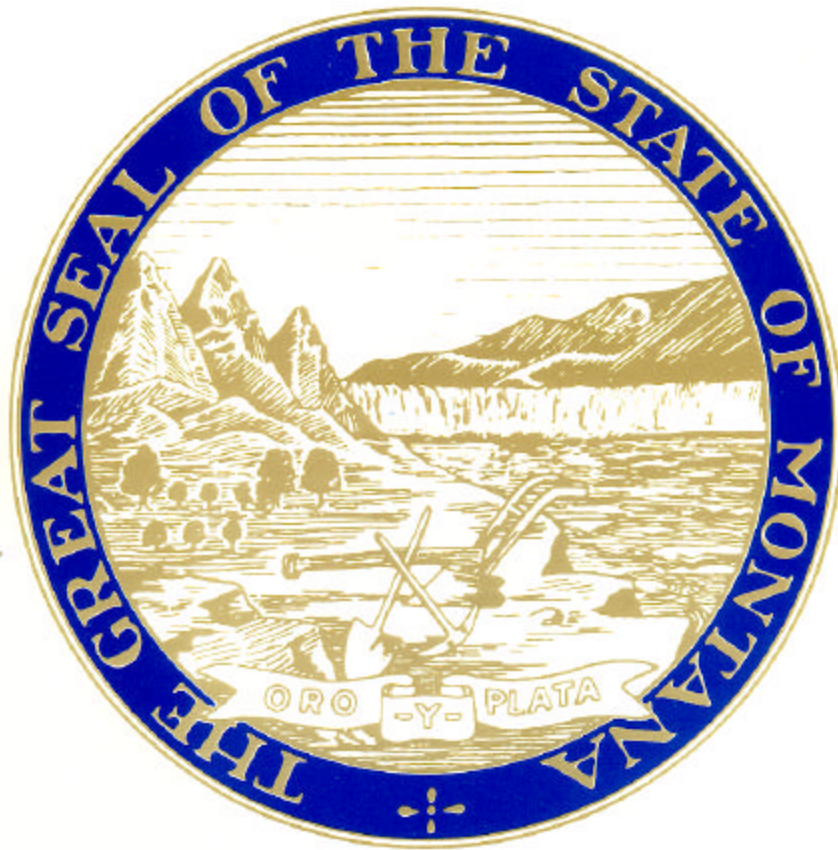


SPECIAL EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

July 6, 2000



**NANCY KEENAN
SUPERINTENDENT**

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

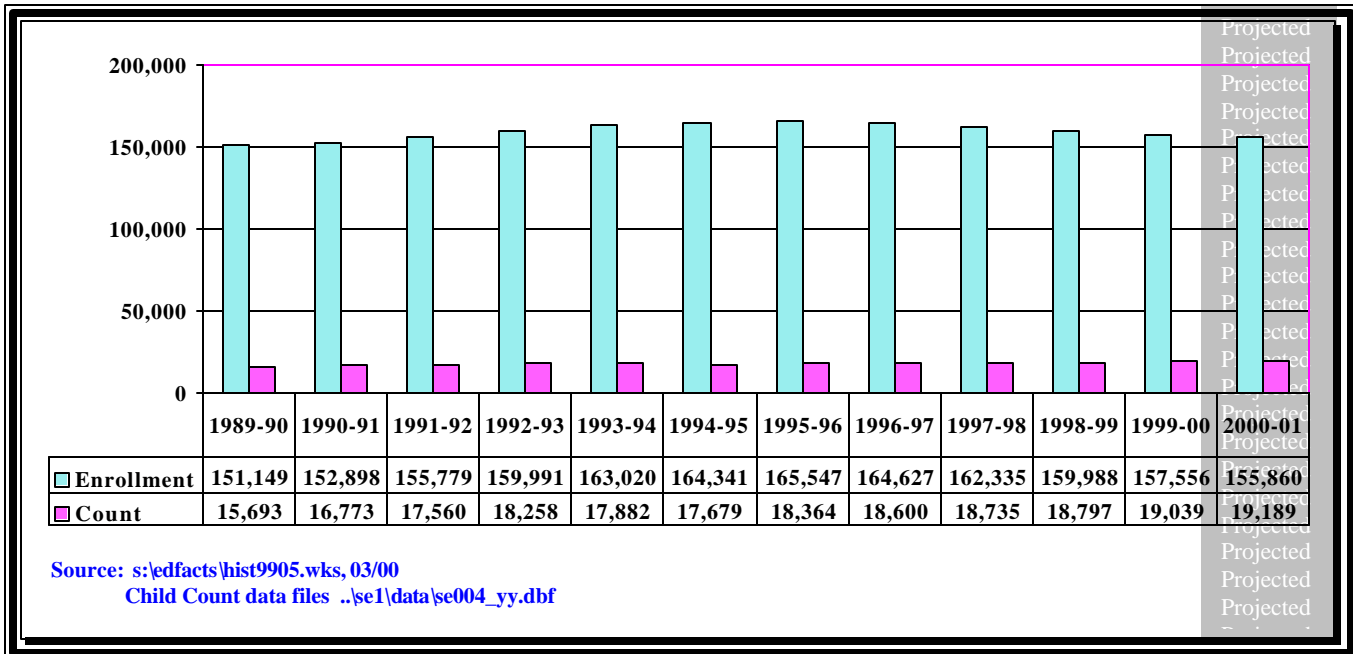
INTRODUCTION

The year 2000 report to the Board of Public Education includes significantly expanded content and a discussion of issues. Prior annual reports to the Board were limited to charts and graphs which presented data on the number of students served, funding, and expenditures. The content of this report adds narrative discussion to the data on students, funding, expenditures and further narrative discussion on major achievements, issues and goals for the 2000-2001 school year.

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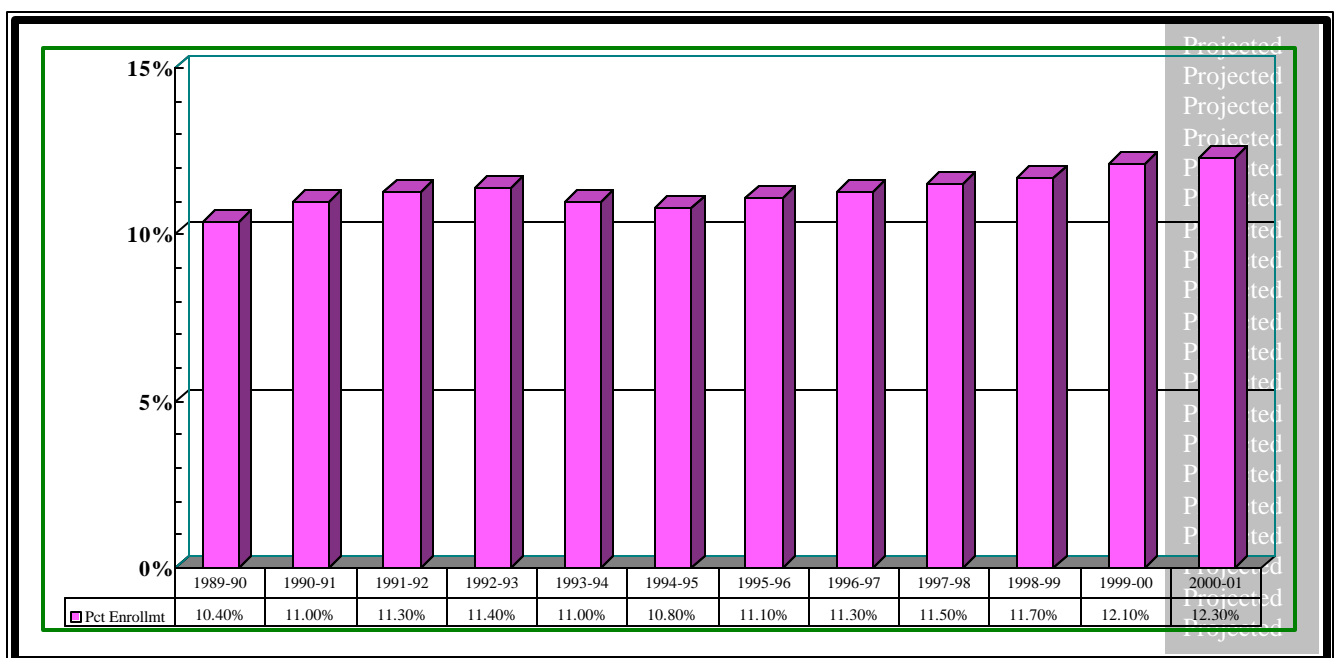
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Population of Students Served



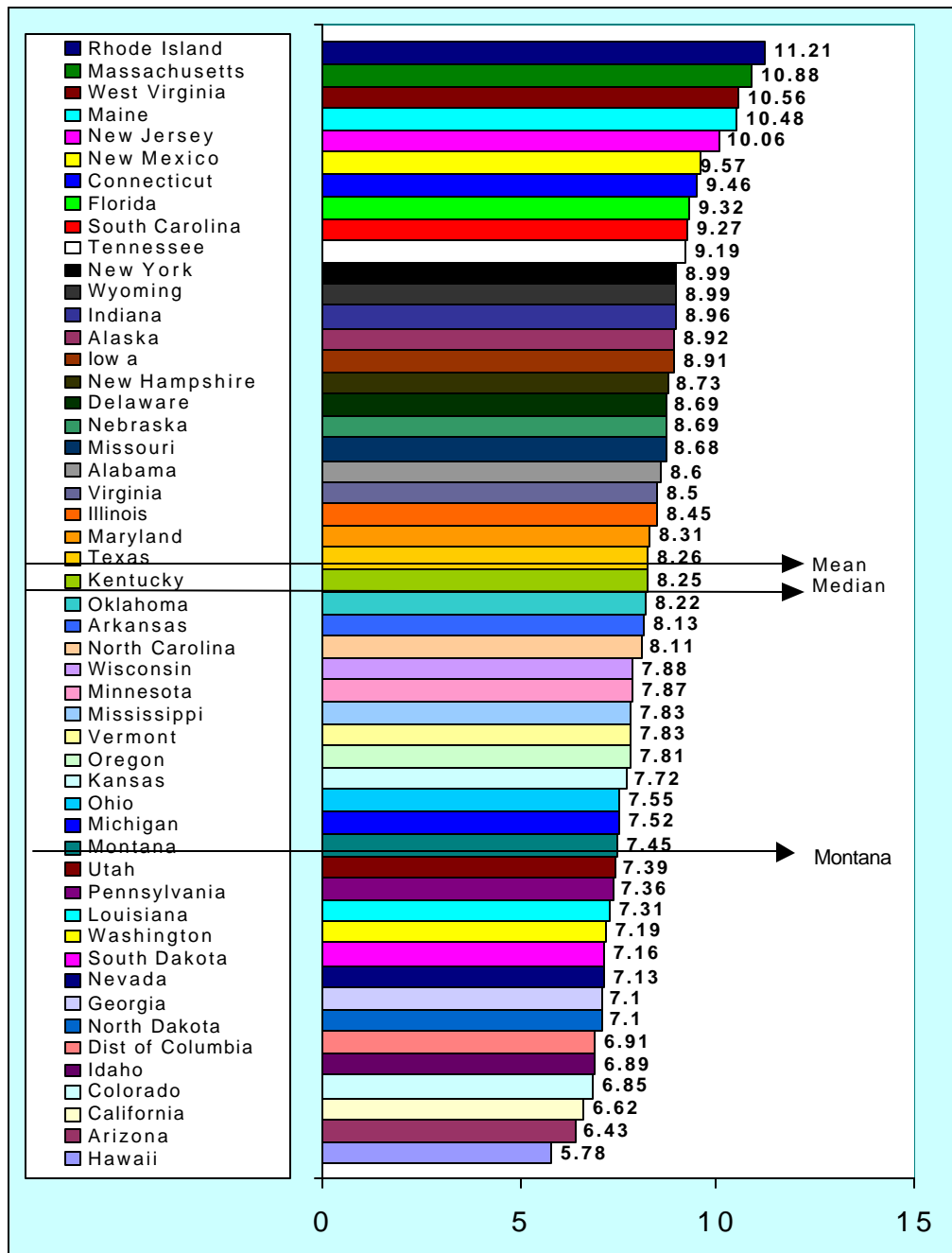
Approximately 19,000 or 12 percent of all students enrolled in Montana public schools receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Special education services are available to all students with disabilities beginning at age three through age 18. Services to students 19, 20, and 21 are permissive. That is, the decision to serve 19, 20 and 21-year-old students is determined by the policies of school district board of trustees.

Students with disabilities receive a wide range of services, including individualized instruction, assistive technology, related services such as speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and/or transition services. Both the type and the extent of services a student receives are individually determined based on the educational needs of the student.

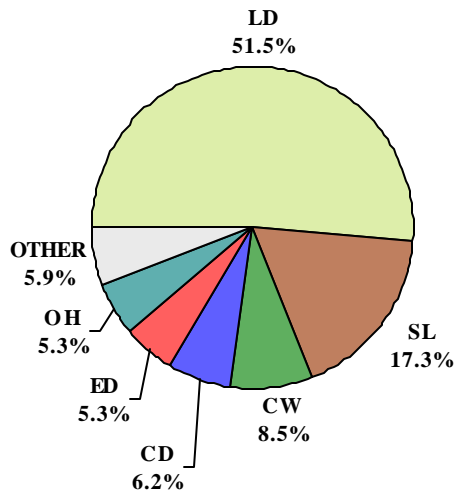


Although Montana's child count has remained relatively stable since 1992-1993 school year (child count 18,258 students for 1992-1993, child count 19,039 students for 1999-2000 school year), the proportion of students served by special education has increased in recent years because of overall declining enrollment. However, Montana still ranks below the mean in the percentage of students served under IDEA according to the 21st Annual Report to Congress.

Percentage (Based on Estimated Population) of Students Served Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1997-98 School Year



Student Identification by Disability



Source: Child Count data files ..\se1\data\se004_yy.dbf

Over 50 percent of all students receiving special education services have their primary disability identified as learning disabled. More than 17 percent of students receiving special education services have speech-language impairment identified as their primary disability. These two categories represent over two-thirds of all students receiving special education services.

Disability Abbreviations

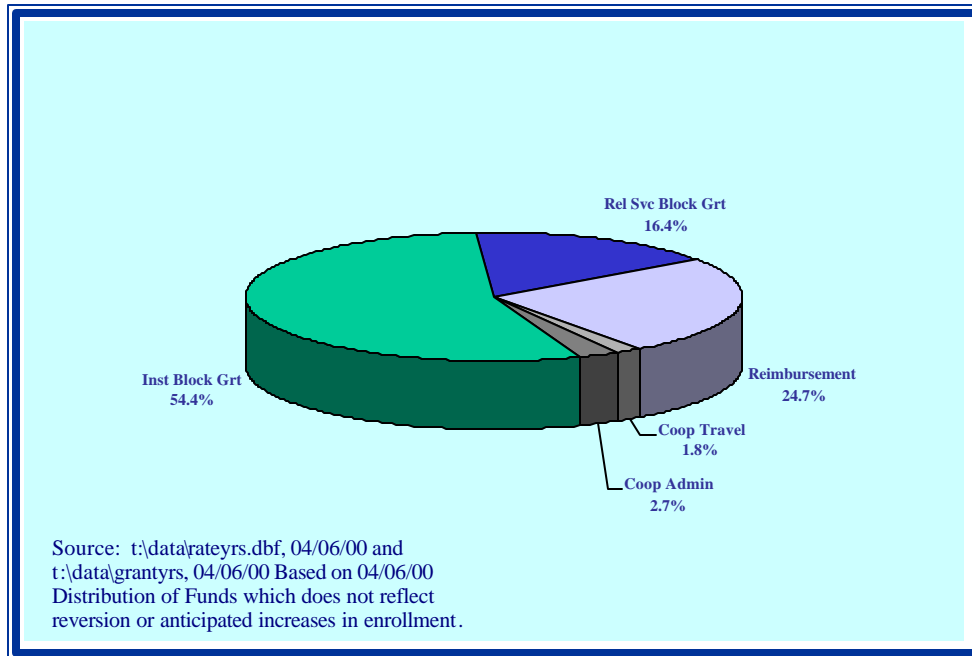
LD	Learning Disability
SL	Speech -Language Imp
CW	Child with Disability
CD	Cognitive Delay
ED	Emotional Disturbance
OH	Other Health Impairment
HI	Hearing Impairment
DE	Deafness
VI	Visual Impairment
OI	Orthopedic Impairment
DB	Deaf-Blindness
MD	Multiple Disabilities
AU	Autism
TB	Traumatic Brain Injury

LD	9,883
SL	3,325
CW	1,626
CD	1,198
ED	1,010
OH	1,023
OTH	1,124

There has been a dramatic increase in the child count category of other health impairment. The number of students identified in this disability category grew from 177 students on December 1, 1989, to 1,015 students on December 1, 1999. A United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, policy letter issued in the early 1990s, stating that children with attention deficit disorder could qualify for special education under the category of other health impairment, is likely to have contributed to this growth.

FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

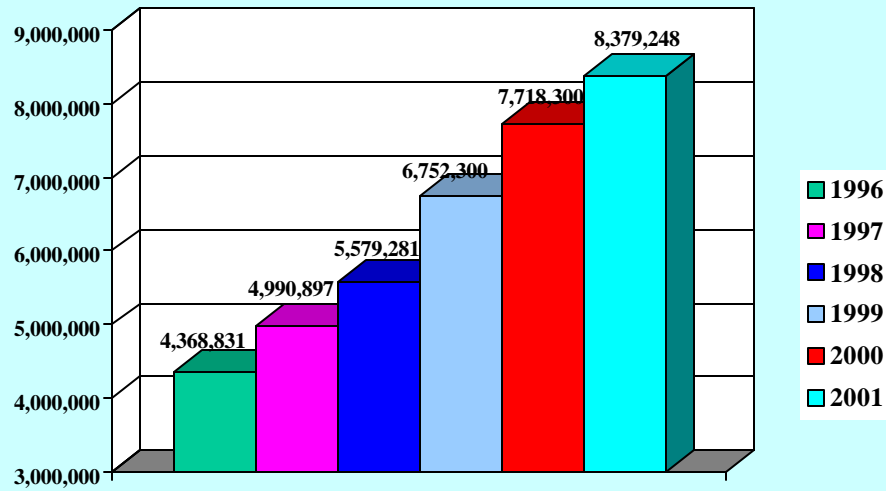
FY 2001 Distribution of State Special Education Appropriation for Block Grants, Coop Operation, Reimbursement



I n s t B l o c k G r t	1 8 , 4 2 8 , 6 4 9
R e l S v c B l o c k G r t	5 , 5 7 4 , 3 7 9
R e i m b u r s e m e n t	8 , 3 7 9 , 2 4 8
C o o p T r a v e l	6 2 0 , 8 0 4
C o o p A d m i n	8 9 9 , 8 8 5
T o t a l	3 3 , 9 0 2 , 9 6 5

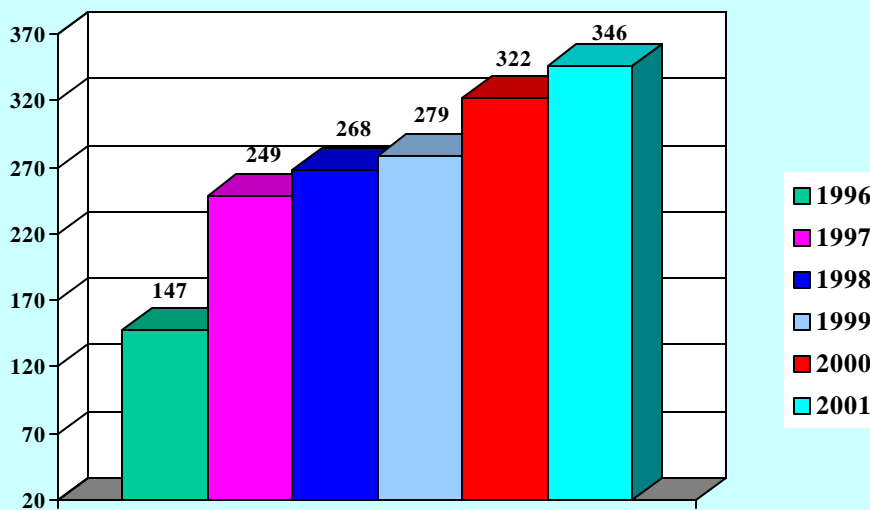
Montana special education funding structure distributes state appropriations based on a combination of total school enrollment and expenditures. Approximately 70 percent of the appropriation is distributed through block grants (instructional block grants and related services block grants) which are based on enrollment, while approximately 25 percent is distributed through reimbursement for disproportionate costs which is based on expenditures. The remaining five percent is distributed to special education cooperatives to cover costs related to travel and administration.

Growth in Reimbursement for Disproportionate Costs



Disproportionate Costs

Growth in Numbers of Districts Receiving Reimbursement for Disproportionate Costs



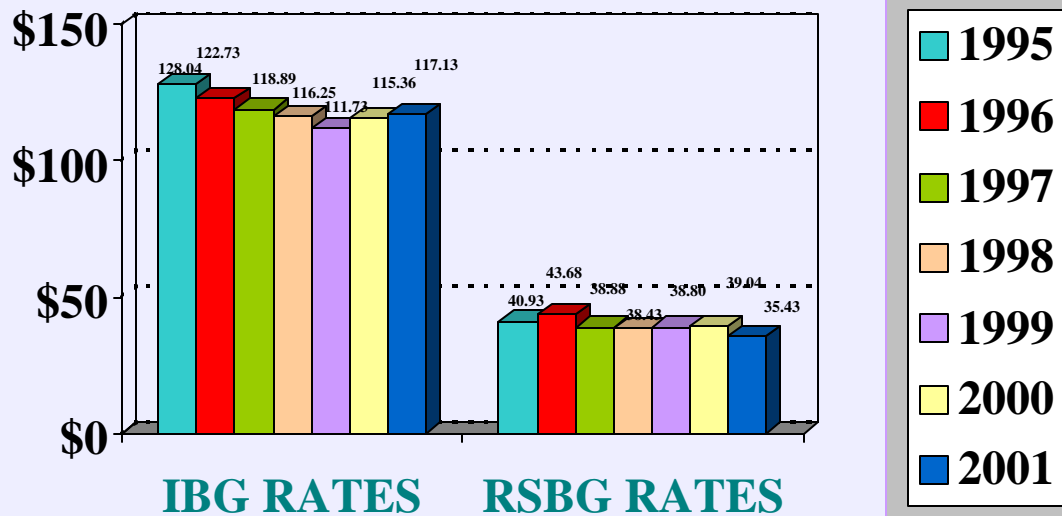
Number of School Districts

Source: T:\data\Le_reim

The proportion of the total state appropriation distributed in the form of reimbursement for disproportionate costs is growing both in total dollars and in the number of districts receiving reimbursement for disproportionate costs. This shift in the proportion of funds distributed in the

form of reimbursement for disproportionate costs is primarily due to increases in local district expenditures for special education while the state share of funding has not kept pace.

Instructional Block Grants and Related Services Block Grants

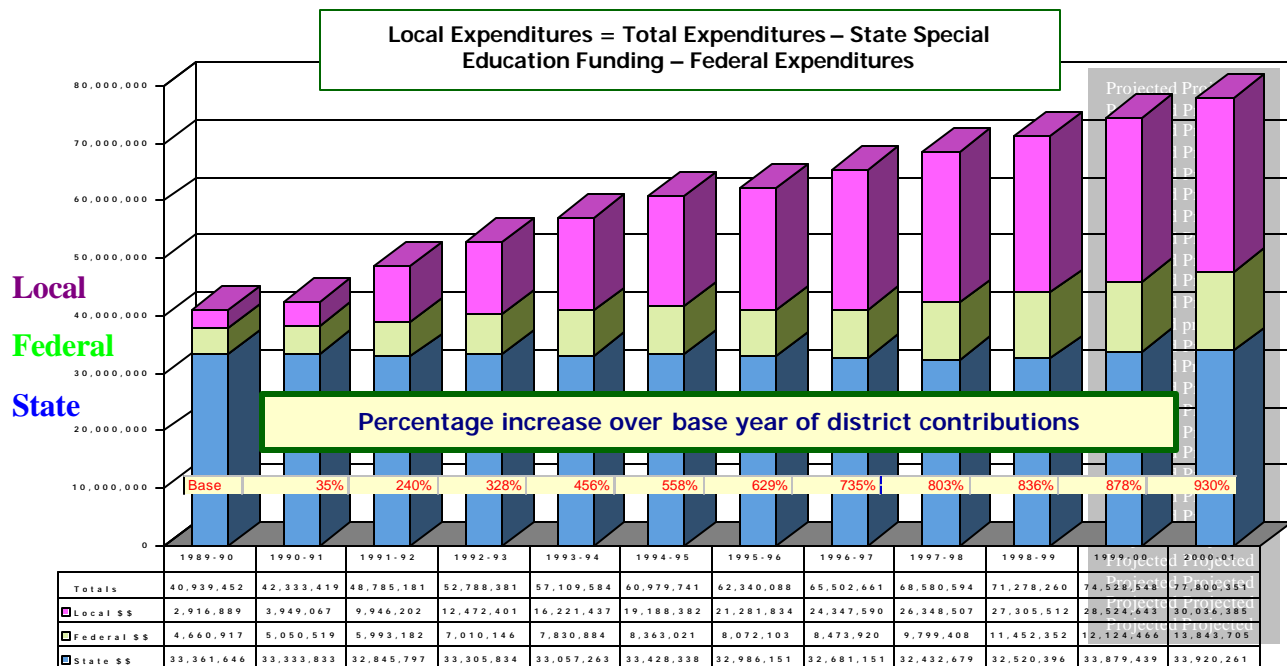


YEAR	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
BG RATES	122.73	118.89	116.25	111.73	115.36	117.13
RSBG RATES	43.68	38.88	38.43	38.80	39.04	35.43

Source: T:\data\Rateyrs

One result of the growing share of the state appropriation for special education being distributed in the form of reimbursement for disproportionate costs is a decline in the block grant rates. The decrease in block grant rates is occurring for both instructional services and related services. It negatively impacts both schools and special education cooperatives. The decline appears to be more severe in the related services block grant rate. As a result, special education cooperatives are significantly effected since the related services block grant is the primary source of funding for the state special education cooperatives. This shift to reimbursement for disproportionate costs also jeopardizes the structure of the funding model's emphasis on block grant distribution of funds.

EXPENDITURES OF STATE, FEDERAL, AND LOCAL FUNDS



Federal

The growth in expenditures for special education has become an issue of national significance. On a national level, attention has been focused on the proportion of federal support for special education. The federal share of special education costs (national average) is approximately 13 percent. Although this is a greater share of the total cost of special education than in the past (three years ago it was approximately eight percent), the proportionate share remains far below the 40 percent level promised by Congress when the special education laws were first passed in the mid 1970s. Since Montana's costs for special education are significantly less than the national average, the federal share of Montana's special education costs are approximately 18 percent.

In Montana, approximately \$75 million is annually spent on special education (projected figure for the 1999-2000 school year). This is a significant increase from the 1989-90 school year when approximately \$41 million of state, federal and local funds were spent on special education. Much of this increase can be attributed to inflation and an increase in the number of students served by special education. Approximately \$12 million of the \$75 million Montana spent on special education comes from federal revenue sources.

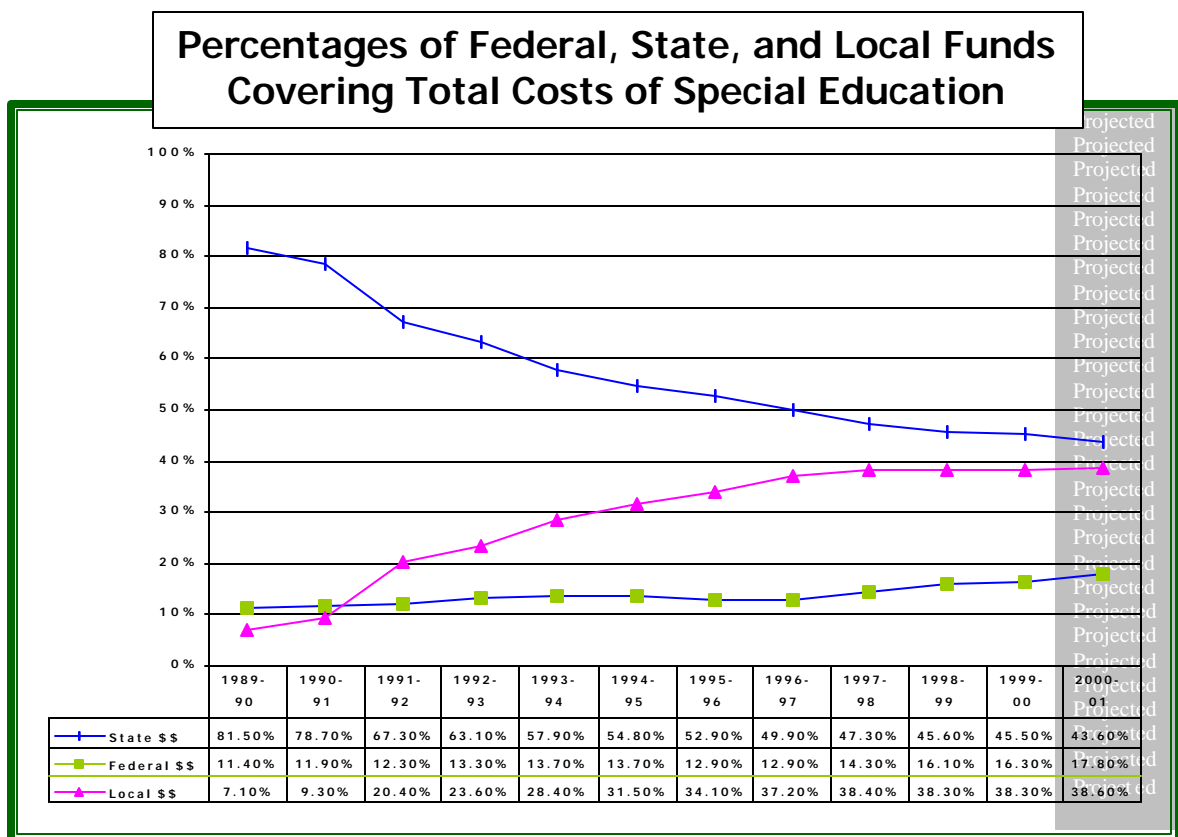
State

State Appropriations for Special Education have fallen far short of the growth in costs. From the 1989-90 school year to the 1998-99 school year, special education was level funded at approximately \$33 million. In 1999, the Montana Legislature increased appropriations for special education by approximately four percent. This increase netted schools approximately \$1.4 million in added funding which was earmarked for special education for school year 1999-2000 and for school year 2000-2001. During a period of increased costs coupled with flat state funding throughout the 1990s, the state share of the total costs of special education has slipped from approximately 81 percent in school year 1989-1990 to approximately 46 percent in school year 1999-2000 (projected).

Local

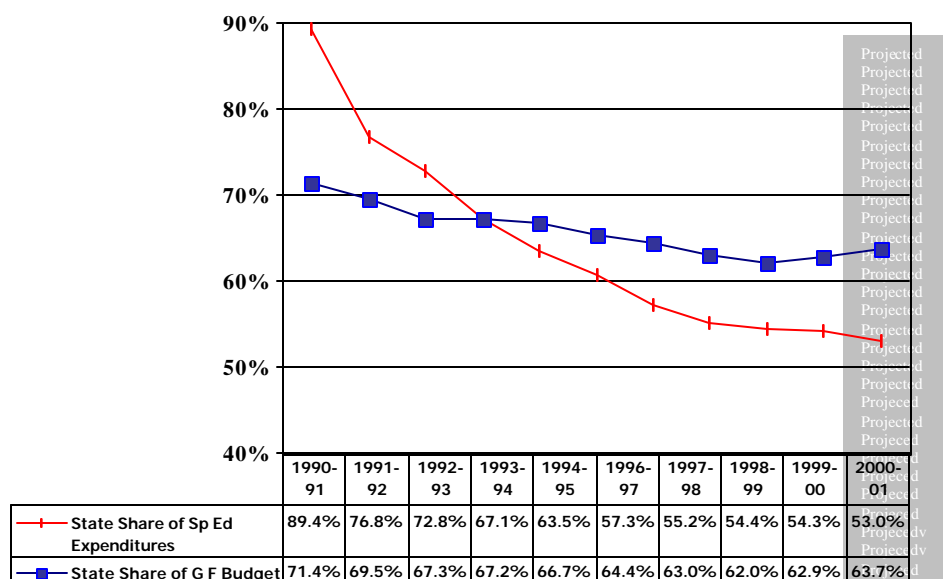
By far the greatest share of funding of the increased costs of special education has come from the local general fund budgets. Local school districts have absorbed the increase in costs of special education by increasing their contribution from approximately \$3 million in 1989-1990 to approximately \$27 million (projected) for the 1999-2000 school year. This represents an almost 900 percent increase in local district contribution for special education.

For purposes of this discussion, "local funds" means special education expenditures from district revenues other than state and federal funds that are specifically earmarked for special education. These "local funds" would have otherwise been available for general education. This shift in allocation of local funds has been a serious concern for schools and parents and has created an atmosphere of competition for dollars.



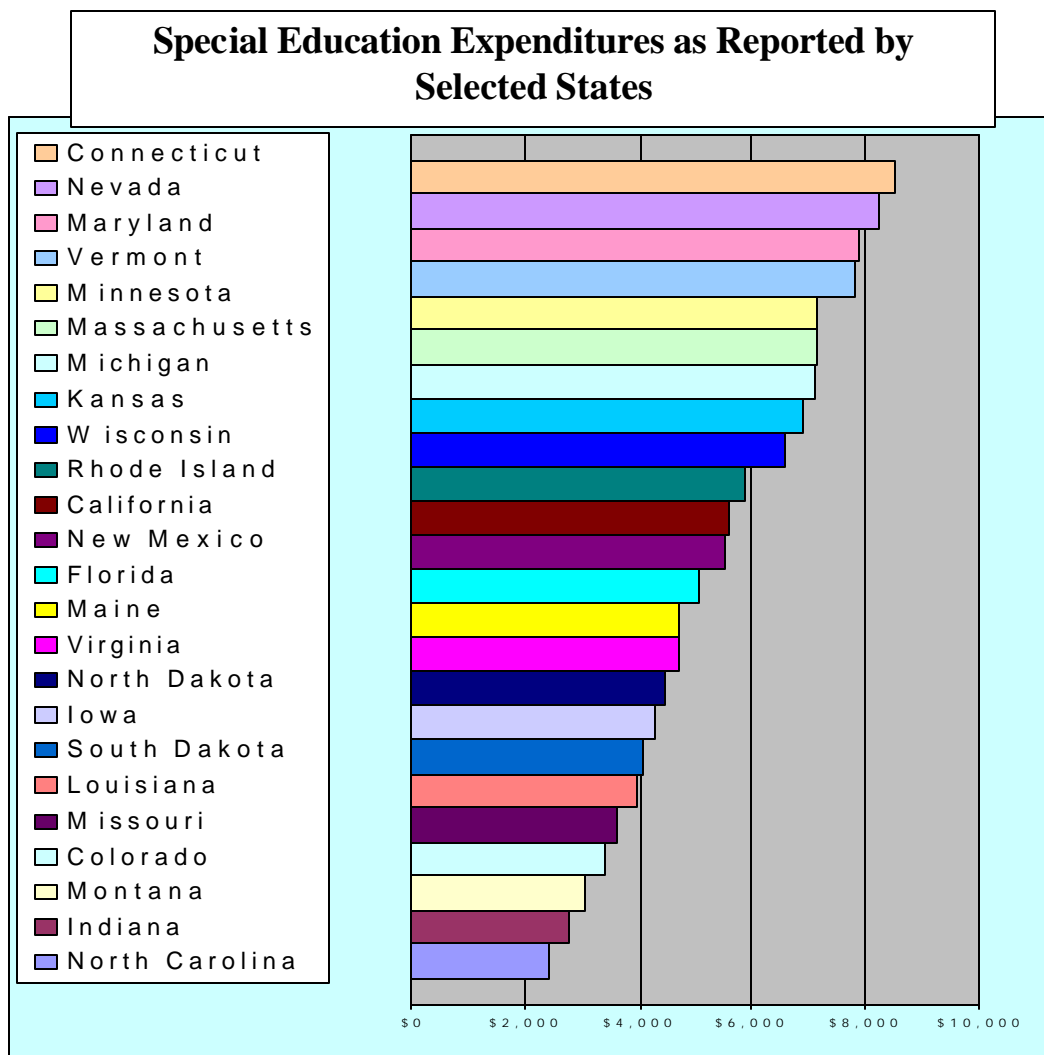
As a result of increased costs in special education during a time when state and federal funding has remained relatively flat, the proportion of “local funds” supporting costs of special education has grown dramatically while the proportion of state funds has declined.

The percentage of state support for earmarked special education general fund expenditures has declined at a rate significantly greater than has the rate of state support for the total general fund budget.



Source: OPI budget files, FY 1991-00
 State share of special education expenditures based on
 projected growth in expenditures.

Another way of studying the effects of relatively flat funding of special education is to compare the percentage of school district general fund expenditures made from earmarked special education funds. State general fund appropriations for special education have slipped from approximately 89 percent to approximately 53 percent (projected) of district general fund budgets on special education allowable costs. In the meantime, the state support of the total general fund budget for all students has slipped from 71 percent to 62 percent. At one time the state share of special education general fund expenditures was 18 percent higher than the state share of general fund budget for general education. Today, the state share of special education expenditures is nine percent lower than the state share of general fund budget for general education.



**Source: CSEF Survey on State Special Education Funding Systems, 1994-95
19th Annual Report to Congress: Section I**

The Center on Special Education Finance (a federally funded technical assistance center) studied special education expenditures in selected states. The review of expenditures of state and local funds on special education indicates that Montana's per student expenditures were significantly below the average of states in the sample group.

STATE PLAN

On April 14, 2000, Montana submitted its application for federal funds for special education under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Part B) to the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Also known as the State Plan, the application provides a description of how Montana will address the

requirements under IDEA. This is the first application for Part B funds that states have submitted to the United States Department of Education that address all of the policy and procedural changes required under the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA and its recently adopted implementing regulation.

Montana's approach to this task was comprehensive. The bulk of the application required submission of State Administrative Rules, many of which required revision to meet new federal requirements. Instead of addressing only the Administrative Rules requiring change, all rules (other than finance) were reviewed. Further, the rules and any policies or procedures that were submitted in the application used the federal regulation as their base. State rules were based on the requirement of federal regulation and were organized in a fashion that established the linkage between federal regulations and supporting state rules.

Parents, advocates, school administrators, teachers, and others reviewed, analyzed and contributed their ideas for revision to state rules. As a result, you will find numerous changes in State Special Education Administrative Rules. Over 30 rules were repealed, 11 rules adopted, and changes were made to the code number for all of the rules.

These changes are intended to:

- Meet Federal Standards. State rules were amended, where necessary, to implement new federal regulations, implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Policies and procedures were revised to comply with application requirements for IDEA Part B funds.
- Establish a Framework. Federal regulations now serve as the foundation for special education requirements in Montana.
- Improve Organization. State rules and their implementing policies and procedures have been reorganized in their content and coded in numerical order to correspond with federal regulatory requirements.
- Reduce Duplication. Many of the state administrative rules that were repealed were duplicates of amended federal regulations.

The Montana State Plan can be found at www.metnet.state.mt.us; click on Programs and Services of OPI, click on Special Education, and choose Current Information.

FEDERAL MONITORING

In April 2000, the Office of Public Instruction received the monitoring report from the Office of Special Education (OSEP), covering the visit they conducted in April 1999. The report reflects the same issues presented by the OSEP during their exit briefing in April 1999. The Office of Public Instruction has already implemented many activities designed to address the concerns noted in the Federal Monitoring Report. The monitoring report covered services to infants and toddlers (also known as Part C) managed by the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the transition of infant and toddlers to public school district preschool programs, as well as services to school-aged students under Part B.

The portion of the OSEP report covering public school services to students, ages three through 21, was divided into three parts as follows: Strengths, Suggestions for Improved Results and Areas of Noncompliance. The following provides a brief overview of the content of the monitoring report.

Strengths

The OSEP identified the following as strengths:

- The OPI's positive working relationship with parents
- Elimination of excessive paperwork for collection of suspension/expulsion data
- A comprehensive staff development project (Montana Behavioral Initiative) to meet the behavioral and social needs of students
- Training for Inclusive Education (TIE) Project that provides training opportunities to assist school districts in inclusive education practices
- Education Interpreter Certificate Project that provides the necessary skills for interpreting in the education setting
- Resolving conflicts with parents through the Early Assistance Program
- Responsiveness of Montana's regionalized personnel development system to unique needs

Suggestions for Improved Results

The OSEP provided the following suggestions for improved results for children with disabilities:

- Additional training for general education teachers to support the education of children with disabilities in general classrooms
- Culturally sensitive, coordinated transition plans should be individually developed to better meet the needs of the Native American population within the state

Areas of Noncompliance

The OSEP identified the following as areas of noncompliance:

- Inadequate number of related service personnel to ensure a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities
- Inadequate statements of needed transition services beginning at age 16
- The OPI not ensuring correction of deficiencies as identified through its monitoring of public agencies
- Not completing due process hearings within 45 days

A copy of the OSEP Monitoring Report will be posted on the Office of Public Instruction web site when the Office of Public Instruction receives an electronic version from the OSEP. A copy of the OSEP Monitoring Report can be obtained from the Division of Special Education by calling 444-5661.

STATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In response to the findings of the Office of Special Education Programs monitoring of Montana's Part B Program, a State Improvement Plan was developed to address the areas of noncompliance.

The state's Special Education Advisory Panel/Steering Committee, special advisors, and staff from the Division of Special Education met on May 11-12, 2000, in Helena, to develop the State Improvement Plan. Judy Gregorian, Associate Division Director, Monitoring and State Improvement Plan Division, of the Office of Special Education Programs, was present for the meeting and helped guide the advisory panel/steering committee in the development of the plan. The purpose of the State Improvement Plan is to ensure that deficiencies identified in the monitoring are corrected. Many activities have already been undertaken to address the deficiencies found in the report. A copy of Montana's State Improvement Plan is attached to this report. See letter to Judy Gregorian, dated June 2, 2000.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Performance Goals

The performance of students with disabilities on achievement of state standards for academic proficiency, post-school outcomes, including employment and interpersonal skills, is a priority.

Through a stakeholder advisory group process, Montana has adopted performance goals and indicators for the performance of children with disabilities. The six primary goal areas are as follows:

- Students with disabilities will demonstrate measurable, continuous progress in development of academic skills targeted by the Montana Performance Standards System for all students.
- Students with disabilities will demonstrate continuous, successful participation in school, resulting in increased graduation rates and decreased dropout rates.
- Students with disabilities will be included, to the maximum extent possible, in statewide assessment systems.
- Students with disabilities will demonstrate the ability to make successful school to adult transitions.
- Students with disabilities will demonstrate self-awareness and interpersonal skills that facilitate success with peers, school personnel, family members, and the community.
- Students with disabilities, parents, early intervention personnel, and school personnel will report confidence and satisfaction with special education and early intervention services planning, implementation, and outcomes.

Academic Skills and Assessment

Montana's contract with Riverside Publishing will support our efforts to collect and analyze the academic performance of students with disabilities. As a result of discussions with Riverside to date, we believe that students with disabilities will be included to the maximum extent possible in the statewide assessment system. Further, Riverside has expressed interest in working with the Office of Public Instruction in the design of an alternate assessment for those few students who will not be able to participate in the Norm Reference Academic Assessments. We anticipate that we will be able to include all students in the statewide assessment system.

Dropout

Data on dropout rates for students with disabilities is collected as part of child count. The data is collected by age, beginning at age 14. For the 1997-98 school year, data shows that a total of 327 students with disabilities, age 14 and older, dropped out of school. In the 1998-99 school year, data shows that a total of 278 students with disabilities dropped out of school. It is important to note that the data collected could include students who did not return to school for reasons other than having dropped out of school (e.g., moved but didn't report it to the school, etc.). Overall, the decline in the dropout rate suggests that progress has been made in decreasing the dropout rates of students with disabilities.

Graduation

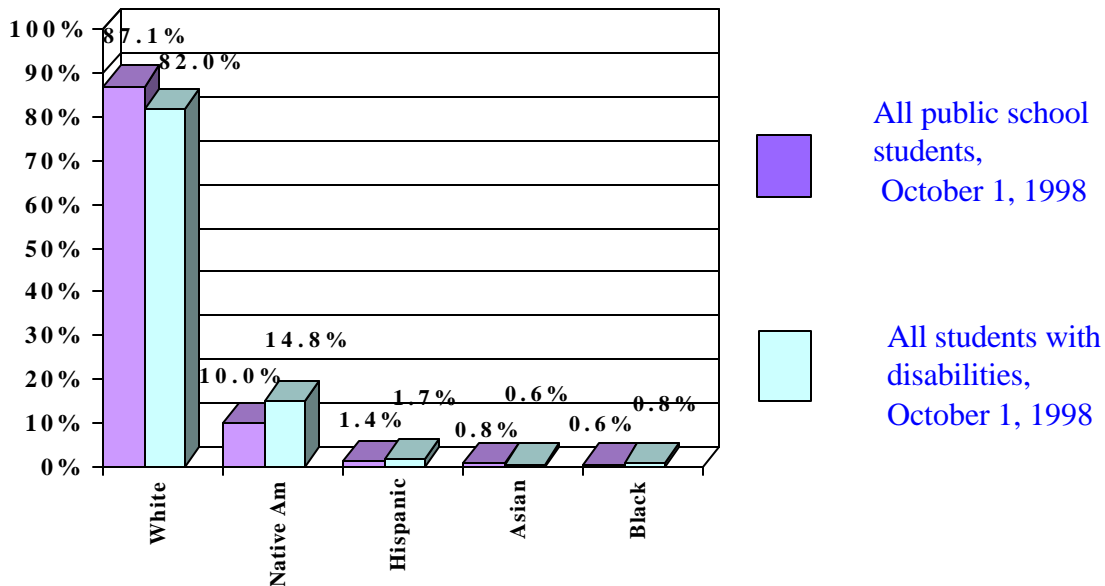
Data on graduation of students with disabilities is collected as part of child count. Child count is the system the Office of Public Instruction uses to identify the numbers of students with disabilities being served by special education. The data on graduation rates is collected by age, beginning at age 14. Data from the 1997-98 school year shows that 533 students with disabilities graduated from school. Data from the 1998-1999 school year shows that a total of 525 students with disabilities graduated from school. Because regular education data is gathered by grade level and not by age level, it is not possible to compare rates of graduation of students with disabilities to students without disabilities at this time.

Suspensions and Expulsions

Prior to the 1997-98 school year, Montana did not collect suspension and expulsion data on students that allowed for disaggregation of the data on students with disabilities. During the 1998-99 school year, the Division of Special Education, in collaboration with the Division of Health Enhancement, implemented a data collection system for information on suspensions and expulsions for all students titled Long-term Out-of-School Suspension/Expulsion Log. Data was collected on the following components: unilateral removal for drug or weapon offenses, removal based on hearing officer determination, and/or long term suspension/expulsion. Analysis of the data shows that there was a total of 1,733 student suspension/expulsions statewide. Of the total number of students suspended or expelled, 410 (23.7 percent of the total) were students with disabilities, while 1,323 (76.3 percent of the total) were students without disabilities. The 410 students with disabilities that were suspended or expelled represent 2.2 percent of the students receiving special education services. The 1,323 students without disabilities that were suspended or expelled represent 1.1 percent of the population of students without disabilities.

Disproportionality in Eligibility Determination

Montana Public School Enrollment by Race for all Enrolled Public School Students and for Children with Disabilities



Disproportionality by race/ethnicity is one measure of fairness in evaluation procedures. If disproportionality exists, it may be due to testing bias, or in some cases, a reflection of differences in the need for education support. Data in this area is therefore tracked and assessment procedures are closely monitored.

In Montana, whites represent approximately 87 percent of all students enrolled in Montana public schools, while they represent approximately 82 percent of all students with disabilities. Native Americans represent approximately 10 percent of all students enrolled and 14.8 percent of all students with disabilities.

Race/ethnicity groupings of Hispanics, Asians, and Blacks comprise a very small proportion of all student enrollment and an equally small proportion of all children with disabilities. The largest of these groups, the Hispanic population, represents less than two percent of the enrolled students and less than two percent of all students with disabilities. To appreciate how relatively small these groupings are, the December 1, 1998 child count identified a statewide total of only 144 Black students with disabilities. The relatively few number of students, and the similar proportion between student enrollment and special education child count for Hispanic, Asian, and Blacks, would suggest that disproportionality is not shown to exist in these populations.

The proportion of Native Americans identified as children with disabilities is higher than the Native American proportionate representation in total student enrollment. While Native Americans represented 10 percent of total student enrollment, they represent 14.8 percent of special education child count. It is likely a variety of factors contribute to the disproportionality. Socio-economic factors, for example, show dramatic differences in the proportion of Native American families living below the poverty level. The 1990 census reported 12 percent of all Montana families living below the poverty level and 41.5 percent of all Native American families living below the poverty level. In other words, Native American families are between three and four times more likely to be living in poverty.

Possible discrimination in assessment practices has and will continue to be an area of vigilance for Montana's special education monitoring system. Assessments for disability determinations are reviewed and professionals are routinely interviewed regarding possible discrimination in assessment practices as an important component of pre-site monitoring. In the past three years, there have been no findings in the monitoring process of discriminatory practice in assessment procedures. Because there is a 4.8 percent discrepancy between the percent of enrollment of Native American students and the proportion of the Native American students identified as IDEA eligible, this component of our monitoring system will remain a priority, especially in schools with large Native American populations.

Monitoring

In accord with IDEA Part B requirements for general supervision, the Office of Public Instruction implements a comprehensive monitoring system which holds schools accountable for implementing state and federal requirements. Under the present system, all schools are monitored on a five-year cycle.

During the 1999-2000 school year, the Office of Public Instruction's Division of Special Education staff conducted 46 on-site monitoring visits. On-site monitoring focused mainly on public school districts, but also included five special education cooperatives, one state-operated program (Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility) and several private programs where students with disabilities have been placed (e.g., Intermountain Children's Home in Helena).

Monitoring reports identified areas of noncompliance, if any were determined during the course of the monitoring, and specified corrective action plans to bring the program into compliance. Reports also identified areas of commendation and included, when appropriate, a technical assistance report. A technical assistance report advises the district, cooperative, or facility on specific points of policy or procedure, or offers suggestions for strengthening the program. Technical assistance reports may also accompany a report acknowledging compliance with the IDEA or accompany a report that contains one or more instances of noncompliance sufficient to require a corrective action plan.

For school year 1999-2000, monitoring reports identified 31 instances of noncompliance needing corrective action plans in 13 sites visited. Of the corrective actions, nine public school districts, out of a total of 35, were issued one or more corrective action plan (CAP), while four private-operated programs accounted for the remaining.

Monitoring Process Review Advisory Group

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) monitoring of Montana found that our system is very effective in identifying deficiencies, but less effective in ensuring that corrective actions are successful in resolving the deficiency.

Partly in response to the federal monitoring and partly in response to a desire to move away from an overemphasis on paper compliance to more of an emphasis on program effectiveness, an advisory group was formed with the purpose of assisting the Office of Public Instruction in redesigning a monitoring system. The Monitoring Process Revision Advisory Group (MPRAG) held three meetings during the 1999-2000 school year. These meetings discussed and proposed changes to the monitoring system. The fourth meeting will be held in September 2000. The process of reviewing and revising Montana's monitoring system will result in an improved system that incorporates the best strategies for school improvement, while continuing to meet the state's obligation to ensure that special education procedures are being properly implemented. For further information on progress toward improving the special education monitoring system, see the State Improvement Plan (under the heading General Supervision) attached to this report.

Due Process and Mediation

Tracking of due process hearings and complaints is a measure of accountability. The frequency in which schools and parents come in conflict may be an indication of the quality of programs available to students, resources available to the schools and parents, and the communication skills of the parties involved. Montana continues to have a very low frequency of hearings.

There have been four due process hearing requests since January 2000, all currently pending. Since January 1, 1999, there were 10 due process hearing requests, all initiated by a parent. Of the 10 requests, only one matter went to actual hearing with the hearing officer finding in favor of the parent. The hearing officer ordered the district to provide the student with the functional behavior assessment by a specialist in autism as specified in the student's IEP. Five of the remaining due process matters were resolved through mediation and a settlement agreement was signed. There were three expedited due process hearing requests, all initiated by the district, one matter went to hearing and two reached settlement agreements. There were two requests for mediation; both issues reached settlement agreement.

Complaints

There are no complaints currently open. In the past year there have been three complaints filed with the OPI (two in 1999, one in 2000). The allegations in these three complaints were failure to follow IEP; failure to evaluate, identify and provide services and denial of FAPE during expulsion; and violation of confidentiality and IEP team makeup. In two complaints the district was found out of compliance in specific areas (failure to follow IEP on one point, and failure to notify parent of procedural rights when district decides not to evaluate student). In one complaint, the district was found in compliance. The two districts that were found out of compliance fulfilled the terms of the final order and the cases were closed.

In addition, seven complaints that were filed prior to 1/1/99 were closed in 1999. In one case the district was found in compliance and, in each of the other six cases, when it was verified that the districts complied with the terms of the final orders and no other issues addressed in the complaints remained open, they were closed.

Early Assistance Program

In the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years, 55 different individuals contacted our office with regard to specific concerns regarding special education and related services for students with disabilities. The following is a compilation of the numbers and types of the most common concerns:

- 14: Development and implementation of the IEP
- 14: Suspension/expulsion (this can range from potential danger to self and others to bringing drugs or weapons to school to use of foul and vulgar language) and placement into interim alternative education settings (IAES)
- 4: Issues over delivery of services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- 4: Evaluation and eligibility for special education and related services
- 3: Poor communication between schools and parents
- 3: Services for students with autism (includes one over provision of ESY)

The OPI has relied heavily upon use of part time permanent seasonal staff to provide expertise as IEP facilitators. In many instances, situations that could have easily moved into complaints or due process were mitigated through the expertise of the facilitator. Certain individuals on the OPI staff have the necessary experience with development and implementation of the IEP, as well as strengths in dealing with people. These problem-solving skills in particular have contributed to a variety of successes.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Division of Special Education at the Office of Public Instruction provides various professional development opportunities to ensure that school personnel are aware of recent research in best practices in serving students with disabilities, as well as programs to help address personnel shortages. Our approach to professional development is through a process called the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). Montana's CSPD addresses statewide, regional, and local needs.

On a statewide basis, the CSPD provides training at major conferences such as Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Montana Education Association (MEA); regional training prioritized on the needs of each of the five CSPD Regions; and technical assistance for individual schools seeking support to better serve students with low-incidence disabilities, such as emotional disturbance, autism, etc.

Montana Behavioral Initiative

The Montana Behavioral Initiative (MBI) is a comprehensive staff development venture created to improve the capacities of schools and communities to meet the diverse and increasingly complex social, emotional and behavioral needs of students. The initiative assists educators and community services personnel to develop the attitudes, skills and systems necessary to have each student leave public education with the social competence needed to succeed in society and the workplace.

The term ‘initiative’ refers to proactive efforts by community and school leaders to identify priority concerns – particularly those involving school violence – and to teach, encourage and recognize those behaviors which constitute acceptable alternatives.

Five community/school partnerships were selected in the spring of 1995 to become model sites. These sites were located in Missoula, Bozeman, Wolf Point, Helena and Whitefish. Each site selected teams of educators, parents and community people that assessed the needs in their schools and community, and developed goals to address those needs. In turn, the teams have developed programs, plans and strategies designed to meet these goals.

The interest and dissemination of the MBI continues to grow across the state. Since 1995, the MBI has been disseminated to 123 schools and communities within the state. These schools and communities have utilized a facilitator who has provided guidance and direction to the MBI teams in the MBI process.

As a result of the MBI process, many positive proactive and preventative programs have been implemented in these schools and communities. These programs are characterized by two important features: 1) local team members are free to choose any validated strategy from an array of proven programs; and 2) team perceptions of need and outcomes are corroborated by some form of evaluation data. To date, the most effective MBI sites have resulted from teams using their evaluation data on an ongoing basis to their decision-making and program management activities.

Approximately 25 facilitators have been recruited and are committed to the MBI process for the 2000-2001 school year. Another component of the MBI is the annual summer institute where site teams representing school and community members are provided training by presenters nationally recognized as experts in the field. The 1999-2000 Summer Institute hosted over 800 participants. Nearly 800 participants registered for the 2000 Summer Institute.

Educational Interpreting Certificate Project (EICP)

The Office of Public Instruction, in collaboration with Front Range Community College in Denver, Colorado, and the state of Wyoming, initiated the Educational Interpreting Certificate Project in the fall of 1996. The project has now expanded into a collaborative project with nine other states and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The purpose of the project is to provide knowledge sets and skills to interpreters working in K-12 education settings to improve instruction to students with deafness. Knowledge-based courses are delivered to participants in their home communities in a variety of ways (e.g., videoconferencing, e-mail etc.) during the fall

and spring semesters of the three-year program. In addition, participants are involved in an annual three-week Summer Institute, which focuses on interpreting skills in the classroom. The curriculum for EICP is a modularized course of study that is based on a national curriculum, which addresses the knowledge and skills necessary for effective interpreting in educational settings. Nineteen educational interpreters completed the project in summer of 1999. Seven interpreters are currently enrolled in the project. Federal IDEA Part B funding (state discretionary funds) is used to support the project.

Special Education Endorsement Project

In 1986, Montana suffered an acute shortage of special education teachers. Despite recruitment efforts in and out of state, the lack of special education teachers forced at least nine school districts to provide special need students with non-endorsed teachers. Immediately evident was a problem that Montana's colleges and universities were not training enough people to meet the state's special education needs, especially in rural communities.

A pilot emergency endorsement program was initiated in 1987. The Special Education Endorsement Project grew out of this emergency plan of action. Montana's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) spearheaded the development of the program, which began in 1988. Since then, the Special Education Endorsement Project has supported the endorsement of many special education teachers. The endorsement project authorizes qualified individuals holding Montana teaching certificates to enter into the project. Accompanying the acceptance into this program is authorization to serve in the capacity of a fully endorsed special education teacher, while completing program requirements (sometimes referred to as a "waiver"). The recipients of the Special Education Endorsement traineeships are eligible to receive funding to pursue higher education, resulting in the endorsement to teach special education. Preference is given to those applicants who are employed by a rural district unable to recruit a fully certified and endorsed special education teacher and who are in possession of a teaching contract in a school that has not hired a fully certified and endorsed special education teacher.

Because the Special Education Endorsement Project allows successful applicants to fill special education teaching positions, while working toward their endorsement, as well as completing their student teaching on the job, ongoing mentoring is required. Mentoring must be provided by the school district through a mentor with special education knowledge and who has participated in a mentor seminar sponsored by Montana State University-Billings.

The shortage of special education teachers has continued to be a challenge in our state. In the 1999-2000 school year, 48 candidates had participated in the Special Education Project, while 39 had participated in the 1998-99 school year.

Currently, we are recruiting teachers for the 2000-2001 school year to participate in the Special Education Endorsement Project. The average time for completing the endorsement is about two years, so the number of candidates overlaps from year to year.

Montana's rural status, combined with the increasing populations in large areas, shows great potential for the expansion and growth of this project. There have been many accomplishments

made in the last 13 years. The hope is that with an increased awareness of the project's existence, along with the growth of outreach programs and telecommunications, we will see an increase in the numbers of teachers wanting to obtain their special education endorsement, while continuing to work in the field and that we will be able to meet that need through expanded programs and on-line communication.

Paraprofessional Training Opportunities

Montana Training Opportunities for Paraprofessionals (MT-TOP) has begun providing statewide training for paraprofessionals, their supervisors and administrators. The MT-TOP model features a training of trainers model, which allows districts to develop a local cadre of trainers through which they can provide inservice training according to local needs, preferences and schedules. This training model is being provided in collaboration with the University of Colorado at Denver. This professional development activity was initiated in January 2000. There are three courses available through the MT-TOP model:

1 – **Paraeducator Supervision Academy** (PSA) – This training is provided to teachers, related service providers and administrators who supervise paraprofessionals. It is a two-day training addressing skills such as 1) establishing working relationships; 2) accessing personal supervisory skills; 3) building work schedules and instructional plans; 4) identifying career development areas for paraeducators through needs assessment; and 5) using feedback to improve the job performance of paraeducators. In January 2000, approximately 110 teachers and administrators participated in this course.

2 – **Trainers of Paraeducators Academy** (TOPA) – This course is for professional educators, related service providers and administrators who want to become local paraprofessional trainers. It consists of a two-day training addressing skills to provide effective presentations to paraprofessionals, characteristics of adult learners, and resources for planning presentations. The course includes time and support to examine, prepare and adapt the MT-TOP curriculum materials. In May of 2000, approximately 100 participants were involved with the TOPA training.

3 – **MT-TOP Academies** – The third course is for teams of paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers and/or administrators. This course provides 12 different academies. These academies include 1) instructional team work; 2) orientation to special education; 3) interpersonal skills; 4) personal growth and development; 5) student supervision; 6) instructional strategies; 7) behavior management; 8) instructional technology; 9) life skills; 10) severe communication support needs; 11) severe behavior support needs; and 12) significant health support needs. Each of these academies is a two-day course. These academies will be offered during the 2000 summer institutes in the five different CSPD regions. This training has the potential of meeting a growing need in the state as the number of paraprofessionals has increased in special education and Title I programs. It promises to provide professional development in a collaborative atmosphere of supervisors, teachers and paraprofessionals.

State Improvement Grant

On April 19, 2000, the Division of Special Education at the Office of Public Instruction was awarded a State Improvement Grant from the United States Department of Education. The grant will be for a total of five years with a funding level of \$550,000 annually. Montana's State Improvement Grant will encompass initiatives that serve four purposes: Align current activities within general and special education; create a unified and coherent agenda of school improvement in Montana; target specific areas of need unique to the delivery of services to students with disabilities, creating new partnerships, approaches, and solutions to improve outcomes in areas known to be in need of improvement; and target statewide challenges in areas of personnel preparation, recruitment, retention and professional development.

Elements of the grant that are of special interest include components that:

- Support student with disability participation in statewide assessments,
- Coordination between special education and improvement efforts for overall school improvement,
- Integrated management information system that brings together data collected by general education, special education and vocational education divisions of the OPI, and
- Expanded efforts at recruitment and retention of special education personnel.

Transition Outcomes Project

As of May 15, 2000, over 50 school districts have expressed interest in participating in the Montana Transition Outcomes Project. This project was initially piloted during the 1999-2000 school year in Billings and Ronan. The project has met with considerable success and support from the schools who were involved. The Montana Transition Outcomes Project affords the following opportunities for participants in the project:

- Participation in training led by state, local, and nationally recognized presenters;
- Resource materials to supplement the training and support school site developments;
- Opportunities to network, problem solve and share success, resources and effective approaches with others throughout the state; and
- Acquisition of new strategies for meeting the transition requirements of IDEA.

The Montana Transition Outcomes Project seeks to involve a number of participants in the project in order to:

- Increase the understanding about transition in the IEP process among key stakeholders who can play an important role in transitioning youth to post-school outcomes;
- Help schools connect with representatives of other agencies who can provide transition services for their students; and
- Promote and coordinate a set of activities and strategies within the IEP process for transitioning youth.

The Office of Public Instruction is encouraged by the interest of schools in becoming involved in this project. Preliminary results of the pilot schools have suggested that the method used in this training activity has been effective in ensuring transition planning activities for students with disabilities are a coordinated set of activities that improve chances for students post-school success.